

# **Summary of submissions Pacific people and organisations**

**New Zealand Disability Strategy  
2026 - 2030**

Faeag `es fuaga ma `on togi - Words are the beginning of action.

This Rotuman proverb reflects a core truth that guides this report. It acknowledges that change begins when people speak and when their experiences and aspirations are listened to with care. The voices shared through this consultation are the foundation for future action, shaping how the New Zealand Disability Strategy responds to the realities of Pacific disabled peoples and their families.

### **About this Report**

The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha (the Ministry) *Summary of Submissions – feedback from Pacific people and organisations* expresses the collective voice of Pacific disabled peoples, their families, and Pacific organisations who contributed to the NZ Disability Strategy consultation through talanoa, written submissions, and online feedback. The title recognises that Pacific communities across Aotearoa have spoken clearly about the barriers they face and the changes they want to see.

This submissions analysis honours those voices. It brings together insights, experiences, and aspirations from across the motu to ensure Pacific perspectives guide the development and implementation of the New Zealand Disability Strategy. Grounding the report in Rotuman language acknowledges the cultural richness of Pacific communities and reinforces that every voice contributes to a stronger, more equitable future.

The Ministry would also like to thank all those who took the time to submit feedback on the draft strategy.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0.

In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to the Crown and abide by the other licence terms. To view a copy of this licence, visit: [CC BY 4.0 Legal Code | Attribution 4.0 International | Creative Commons](#).

Please note that no departmental or governmental emblem, logo or Coat of Arms may be used in any way which infringes any provision of the Flags, Emblems, and Names Protection Act 1981. Attribution to the Crown should be in written form and not by reproduction of any such emblem, logo or Coat of Arms.

ISBN 978-1-991429-07-0 (Online)

Citation

Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha (2025). New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 2030: Summary of submissions –Pacific people and organisations Retrieved from [www.whaikaha.govt.nz](http://www.whaikaha.govt.nz)

Published in May 2026

Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha

Wellington, New Zealand.

Contact

[disabilitystrategy@whaikaha.govt.nz](mailto:disabilitystrategy@whaikaha.govt.nz) or 0800 WHAIKAHA (0800 942 452)

**Table of Contents:**

- Executive Summary .....5
- High-Level Themes from Pacific Submissions .....5
- Background and context.....7
- Purpose of this report.....7
- Approach to strategy refresh .....7
- Analysis of feedback.....8
- Feedback on overall strategy .....9
- Feedback on the vision and principles ..... 11
- Vision ..... 11
- Principles ..... 12
- Feedback on priority outcome areas ..... 13
- Education..... 13
- Employment..... 15
- Health ..... 18
- Housing ..... 22
- Justice..... 24
- Impact of submissions on the final strategy and next steps ..... 27

## Executive Summary

This report reflects feedback received from Pacific disabled people, their families, and Pacific communities during consultation on the draft New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030. Submissions were received through written feedback, online forms, and talanoa sessions hosted by government agencies and Pacific-led organisations.

Overall, feedback emphasised the need for Pacific-led solutions, stronger partnerships with Pacific communities in policy design and implementation and approaches that place families and communities, rather than individuals, at the centre. Submitters supported many concerns raised by other communities but also highlighted distinct priorities for Pacific peoples.

## High-Level Themes from Pacific Submissions

- **Pacific-led solutions and partnerships**

Submitters called for Pacific leadership in decision-making, implementation, and monitoring, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and equity obligations. They stressed the importance of using Pacific methodologies and culturally grounded approaches across all priority areas.

- **Collective and family-centred approaches**

Current systems were seen as too individual-focused. Pacific communities want whānau and aiga at the centre of service design and delivery, reflecting collective values and cultural identity.

- **Equity and resourcing gaps**

There are strong concerns about systemic inequities, including:

- **Health:** Long waits, high costs, fragmented care, and inequities between ACC and Disability Support Services (DSS).
- **Housing:** Overcrowding, poor quality homes, and lack of accessible housing stock.
- **Education:** Limited Pacific representation, teacher capability gaps, and poor transition pathways.

- **Employment:** Discrimination, inaccessible workplaces, and complex MSD/Work and Income NZ (WINZ) processes. Submitters called for increased funding for Pacific providers, culturally appropriate services, and universal design standards.
- **Transport as a critical enabler**

Transport barriers were repeatedly identified across health, education, employment, and justice. Submitters recommended national coordination, subsidised mobility services, and training for transport staff.
- **Workforce capability and cultural safety**

Submitters highlighted the need for disability responsiveness and cultural safety training for health professionals, teachers, employers, and justice staff. They also called for recruitment and retention strategies to grow Pacific representation in health, education, and justice sectors.
- **Accessible communication and navigation support**

Submitters reported that information is often inaccessible, overly complex, and not available in Pacific languages. They recommended one-stop hubs, interpreters, easy-read materials, and digital and non-digital options.
- **Data sovereignty and accountability**

Pacific communities stressed the importance of co-designing data systems to uphold data sovereignty, enable equity monitoring, and ensure transparent reporting.
- **Emergency preparedness and climate resilience**

Submitters noted that emergency planning does not adequately include disabled people and called for disability-inclusive protocols and accessible communications. Pacific communities expressed hope in the vision for equity but reported low trust and confidence that change will occur without clear accountability, resourcing, and Pacific leadership. Addressing these issues requires integrated, culturally grounded approaches, investment in workforce capability, and Pacific-led partnerships to ensure policies reflect lived realities and deliver meaningful outcomes.

# Background and context

## Purpose of this report

This report summarises key themes that were highlighted by Pacific disabled peoples and Pacific submitters during consultation on the draft of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030.

It reflects the feedback the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha (the Ministry) received during public consultation and is not a representation of the Ministry's position on the feedback.

## Approach to strategy refresh

The refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy was undertaken through two processes. Firstly, targeted consultation took place with the disability community on the Vision and Principles of the strategy. Secondly, working groups made up of disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, industry/sector experts, and officials from government agencies developed goals, success descriptions, and actions for each of the five outcome areas included in the strategy (education, employment, health, housing, and justice).

The Ministerial Disability Leadership Group<sup>1</sup> and the Minister of Justice approved a draft strategy for public consultation. This took place from 11 August to 28 September 2025. The Ministry sought feedback from the public to gauge support for aspects of the draft strategy and identify gaps and emerging priorities.

Feedback was sought in a range of ways including:

- an accessible online feedback form
- a Word feedback form, which respondents could fill in and return via email or post.
- a 3-minute video with videomail.io
- online and in-person hui and email submissions

---

<sup>1</sup> The Ministerial Disability Leadership Group is made of Ministers with portfolios that have been recognised as priorities for disabled people. The group meets regularly and provides collective leadership and direction on disability issues across government

Given the recent consultation and extensive community engagement on Atoatoali’o – the Ministry of Disabled People’s National Pacific Disability Approach<sup>2</sup>, talanoa sessions were arranged with local Pacific organisations that specialise in the priority outcome areas relevant to the strategy. These organisations were asked to host Pacific community groups to discuss the strategy. The Ministry Fautua Sili (Chief Advisor), Pacific Peoples managed and facilitated these talanoa. This approach was developed with the Pacific Disability Community, and over 400 people across the country participated in these talanoa sessions.

The talanoa locations were:

- Kerikeri (included participants from all of Northland)
- Auckland, Pacific Youth (including wider Auckland)
- Wellington (included from participants Porirua, and Hutt Valley)
- Napier (included participants from Hawke’s Bay)
- Horowhenua (included participants Manawatu and Whanganui)
- Christchurch

## **Analysis of feedback**

Feedback from Pacific peoples was largely received through in person Talanoa sessions across the country. Quantitative data was not collected at a meaningful scale because Pacific communities strongly preferred Talanoa based engagement, which created safe, culturally grounded spaces for sharing their experiences. As a result, survey participation was low, with many Pacific disabled people and their families choosing -face-to-face- dialogue instead of written or online forms. This contributed to a small and uneven survey sample that could not produce reliable quantitative insights for Pacific peoples. However, the data that was received showed similar patterns to the total population with good agreement with the vision, principles, goals, and actions, but less confidence that the strategy will lead to meaningful change. In contrast, the talanoa sessions drew large numbers across regions, generating rich qualitative feedback.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/resources/strategies-and-studies/strategies/atoatoalio-national-pacific-disability-approach>

Specialist software called NVivo was used to identify themes for further analysis. It also allowed us to identify and separately extract feedback and themes from disabled Pacific individuals and Pacific groups.

The purpose of this analysis was to capture and understand the feedback received from disabled Pacific peoples and their families and communities including how their views compare with overall feedback on the draft strategy. This report will inform future work to implement the strategy, to support disabled Pacific peoples and their families to thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life.

The qualitative analysis provided in the following sections of this report encompasses all feedback types received during consultation from disabled Pacific peoples and Pacific groups, organisations, families, and individuals. Direct quotations have been used to capture feedback in the submitters' own words.

## **Feedback on overall strategy**

Overall, Pacific disabled people and their families felt that the strategy was generic and did not reflect the realities of Pacific communities. While they shared several concerns raised by other submitters, they also identified unique issues rooted in culture, language, and community structures that were not visible in the strategy. Submitters stressed that the strategy should recognise intersecting Pacific identities such as Pacific disabled people who also belong to Māori or LGBTQIA+ communities and should provide targeted visibility and tailored support, rather than relying on broad, one size fits all measures.

### **The Strategy needs to be implemented consistently to support regional equity.**

Submitters expressed concerns that, if not done right, implementation of the strategy could be inconsistent across agencies and regions, and that local government and transport planning could fail to reflect the strategy's intent. They recommended clear implementation standards, obligations on councils and agencies, and actions to address urban and provincial disparities.

### **The Strategy needs strong data, monitoring, and public accountability to drive real change.**

Submitters highlighted that limited data and public reporting make it difficult to understand how well agencies are supporting Pacific disabled people, to track progress over time, or to hold agencies to account. They explained that inconsistent data collection, unclear indicators, and poor visibility of Pacific-specific outcomes mean that problems are often overlooked, and improvements cannot be measured. To address these gaps, submitters called for robust and transparent monitoring frameworks that include clear performance measures, regular public reporting, and accessible dashboards.

They also recommended involving disabled people and Pacific communities directly in oversight processes to ensure reporting reflects lived experience, strengthens accountability, and drives continuous improvement across the system.

### **The Strategy needs a realistic scope and timeframe to address long-standing inequities.**

Submitters considered the proposed five-year timeframe unrealistic, citing a decade of shortfalls in disability supports especially for Māori and Pacific disabled people. They asked for longer strategic horizons, stronger transparency, and policy changes such as removing income-testing for couples to align with equity aims.

### **The Strategy must recognise intersectional Pacific identities and provide targeted support.**

Submitters urged that the strategy should better recognise intersecting identities (disabled Māori, Pacific peoples, LGBTQIA+ communities) and provide targeted visibility and support rather than generic measures.

### **The Strategy must embed disability-inclusive emergency and climate planning.**

Submitters expressed concern that emergency preparedness and climate resilience planning do not include disabled people. They called for embedding disability-inclusive emergency and climate planning in health, housing, and community strategies.

## **The Strategy should use empowering language and adopt a holistic, culturally grounded approach.**

Submitters asked for the strategy to avoid disempowering language and highlight a social model that recognises strengths and abilities, not deficits. They recommended adopting a holistic approach across health, transport, housing, education, and justice, and ensuring compassionate, culturally safe communication throughout government.

## **Feedback on the vision and principles**

### **Vision**

The proposed vision was: 'New Zealand is an accessible and equitable society for disabled people and their whānau – a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life.'

### **The Vision must reflect Pacific cultural realities and lived experience.**

Submitters generally supported the intent of the proposed vision but felt it did not fully reflect the lived experience of Pacific disabled people. They considered the wording aspirational but too broad, noting that it lacked clear recognition of cultural diversity, family structures, and the specific barriers faced by Pacific communities. Submitters wanted the vision to more strongly acknowledge equity, intersectionality, and the need for culturally grounded approaches that enable Pacific disabled people to truly thrive and participate.

### **The Vision needs to explicitly honour Te Tiriti and be inclusive of Māori and Pacific peoples.**

Submitters considered that alongside the principles discussed below, the vision should also explicitly honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and centre tāngata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled people. They considered that Te Tiriti is present but not respected enough in practice. Submitters recommended rewording the vision to emphasise an accessible and equitable society honouring Te Tiriti, where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate collectively.

## Principles

The draft strategy proposed 7 principles, which outline the key values and commitments that underpin the strategy: Accessibility, Choice and Control, Equity, Cultural inclusion and intersectionality, Human rights, Participation and inclusion, Respect and dignity, and the Treaty of Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi).

### **The principles must define accessibility across the full spectrum of needs.**

Submitters highlighted that accessibility in the strategy must go beyond physical access to include sensory, digital, social, cultural, and communication accessibility. They called for NZSL, plain language, easy read/audio formats, and translated materials as standard. Submitters also suggested adding a Mobility and Infrastructure Equity principle into the strategy to cover transport, footpaths, signage, and emergency readiness.

The principles should make participation and inclusion real in everyday life.

Submitters warned that the principle 'participation and inclusion' should not be aspirational buzzwords. They recommended spelling out how participation and inclusion happen in everyday life, including technology literacy supports and removing digital-only barriers.

### **The principles must embed data and accountability to ensure measurable progress.**

Submitters stressed that data and accountability should be embedded in the principles or added as a standalone principle because, without clear measurement and oversight, the strategy's commitments risk remaining purely aspirational.

They called for robust public reporting and consistent performance measures to make progress visible and comparable over time, including disaggregated results for Pacific disabled people. Submitters also recommended governance roles for disabled people to ensure lived experience informs decision-making and to hold agencies to account so that the principles translate into measurable, equitable outcomes.

## Feedback on priority outcome areas

The sections that follow share themes from feedback on the five priority outcome areas for the strategy: education, employment, health, housing, and justice. Submitters were asked to provide feedback on the proposed goal, description of success, and actions for each priority outcome area.

### Education

#### **Teacher training must build disability competence and cultural safety.**

Submitters raised concerns that teachers often lack training in disability and neurodiversity understanding and practice, and schools face shortages of disability specialists and skilled Pacific Island teacher's aides. Pacific families emphasised that teacher training is not culturally responsive and that many educators lack understanding of both disability and Pacific cultural contexts.

Submitters called for mandatory disability-responsive teaching in initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, including NZSL exposure, cultural safety training, awareness of assistive technologies and available avenues for support. They also recommended increasing staffing levels, embedding specialist services in schools, and adopting a whole-of-school approach where principals, teachers, aides, and specialists are all equipped to support disabled learners effectively.

#### **Education settings must be physically and digitally accessible.**

Submitters highlighted that schools and tertiary institutions often lack necessary accessible features such as ramps, accessible toilets, and safe layouts, while online platforms remain difficult to navigate for disabled children and young people. They noted that transport barriers and inaccessible digital systems undermine participation and equity for disabled learners.

Submitters called for infrastructure upgrades to meet universal design standards, coordinated transport solutions for learners who rely on mobility services, and fully accessible digital resources.

## **Transition pathways need coordinated and culturally responsive support.**

Transitions between early childhood education (ECE), school, tertiary, and employment were described by submitters as poorly supported, leaving families to manage complex pathways alone.

Submitters urged the development of supported, personalised transition plans that link education with health and employment systems and include early career preparation for disabled youth. Pacific families emphasised that they must be included in planning and decision-making throughout the learner's education journey, with culturally responsive advocacy and wraparound support available at each stage.

## **Education systems must reflect Pacific identity and strengthen cultural responsiveness.**

Submitters explained that there is limited Pacific representation in education leadership and curricula and that education settings rarely reflect Pacific disabled identities. They also noted that language barriers further restrict engagement by Pacific disabled learners and their families. Pacific disabled learners and their families reported feeling undervalued and invisible.

Submitters called for embedding cultural responsiveness through Pacific language resources, family inclusion, and specialist supports in schools and the establishment of specialist schools where appropriate. They recommended integrating Pacific content into teaching programmes, recruiting more Pacific educators and support staff, and ensuring advocacy services that support Pacific disabled learners and their families are culturally competent and accessible.

## **Early diagnosis and support must be affordable, consistent, and timely.**

Submitters reported that early identification and intervention for neurodiverse learners is costly and inconsistent, with long wait times and uneven service availability across regions. They noted that families are often required to self-fund specialist assessments, which many cannot afford, creating inequitable access to early support. Submitters explained that these barriers delay diagnosis, limit opportunities for tailored learning support, and place additional stress on Pacific families who already face financial and systemic challenges.

Submitters recommended the Government should better fund early assessments and provide equitable learning supports from ECE through tertiary education to prevent delays in intervention. Submitters also highlighted the need for clear information on entitlements and where to access support, noting that a lack of awareness creates unnecessary stress and inequitable outcomes for learners and their families.

### **Tertiary education must provide equitable and culturally responsive support.**

Submitters highlighted that support for disabled learners at tertiary level remains basic and uneven, with accommodations such as note-taking and extended exam time not consistently available.

Submitters advocated for strengthening tertiary-level support, ensuring consistent provision of assistive technologies, and improving awareness among staff and students about available resources. They emphasised that tertiary institutions must adopt universal design principles and provide culturally responsive support for Pacific disabled learners.

## **Employment**

### **Workplaces and recruitment systems must be accessible by design.**

Submitters emphasised that many workplaces and recruitment processes are inaccessible, both physically and digitally. Barriers such as lack of ramps and accessible toilets, and digital systems that do not support screen readers or alternative formats, prevent disabled people from being able to show their capability and participate fully in their workplace.

Submitters recommended several measures to improve workplace accessibility and inclusion. They called for universal design standards to be consistently applied across workplaces and recruitment systems, supported by dedicated funding for accessibility needs. Submitters also highlighted the need for clearer policies and stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. In addition, they urged employers to provide more flexible work environments, including flexible hours, working from home options, and accessible workspaces that meet the diverse needs of disabled employees.

## **Employers need capability to create inclusive and culturally safe workplaces.**

Submitters reported experiencing persistent discrimination and negative attitudes toward disabled people in the workplace, which limit opportunities and create exclusionary workplace cultures. They called for employers to receive training in disability responsiveness and cultural safety, alongside initiatives to share authentic success stories that demonstrate genuine inclusion rather than tokenistic examples.

Recommendations included delivering comprehensive training for employers and managers that will develop an understanding of Pacific cultures and disabilities, funding disability awareness, and inclusive leadership programmes. A few submitters suggested for employers to partner with communities using Soalaupule (collaborative decision-making) principles.

## **Employment pathways must provide tailored and culturally informed support.**

Submitters shared that they experienced limited employment pathways and highlighted the need for better employment pathways for Pacific disabled people. Submitters suggested support that includes CV preparation, interview skills support, job coaching, and mentoring. Additionally, submitters called for partnerships between government agencies, local councils, and disability providers to deliver supported employment programmes and culturally informed mentoring. Suggested actions by submitters include developing job hubs to connect employers with disabled jobseekers, funding supported employment and mentoring initiatives, incentivising employers to provide on-the-job training, and creating Pacific-led employment hubs that involve rural regions like Northland.

## **Employment policy must remove barriers to accessing income support.**

Submitters expressed concern about complex Work and Income NZ (WINZ) processes that create barriers to work. They highlighted that benefit abatement rules can often leave people financially worse off when they try to work. This created a sense of being “punished for trying to work.”

Submitters urged MSD and WINZ to simplify their processes, reduce paperwork, provide clear and accessible information in Pacific languages,

and introduce one stop shop models to make employment supports and benefits easier for disabled people to navigate.

### **Disabled workers must receive fair wages and equitable pay.**

Submitters raised concerns about wage inequities experienced by disabled people and the use of minimum wage exemptions. They called for fair pay and for employers to adopt the living wage for disabled workers.

Recommendations included removing minimum wage exemptions, adopting living wage standards across all sectors employing disabled people, and ensuring equitable pay policies, with compliance monitored through audits.

### **Transport must be accessible to enable participation in work.**

Submitters considered that transport remains a major barrier to employment for disabled people, particularly in rural areas, and for those reliant on accessible public transport.

They recommended the Government should:

- integrate universal design principles into transport planning.
- collaborate with councils and operators to provide accessible and affordable transport options.
- introduce travel concessions for carers and support persons so they can more easily support disabled people to get to their workplaces; and
- establish national training standards for transport staff to ensure respectful and consistent service delivery.

### **Rural regions need targeted employment support for Pacific disabled people.**

Submitters emphasised that rural regions have very limited job opportunities for disabled people, creating significant barriers to gaining experience, developing skills, and securing meaningful employment. They explained that fewer employers, limited accessible roles, and transport challenges make it particularly difficult for Pacific disabled people in rural areas to participate in the workforce.

To address these issues, submitters called for targeted support through Pacific led employment hubs in rural areas, partnerships with local councils and businesses to create accessible roles and training programmes, and financial incentives for employers in regional areas to hire disabled workers.

## **Employment transitions must support people who acquire disabilities.**

Submitters raised concerns about people who acquire a disability through injury or trauma, such as workplace accidents or post-traumatic stress disorders, noting that these individuals need tailored support to transition both leaving and returning to work.

Submitters also called for better support for those transitioning back into work, including funding rehabilitation and workplace adjustment programmes, providing flexible employment models and phased return-to-work options, and offering mental health support and culturally informed services for those experiencing trauma-related disabilities.

## **Health**

### **Primary and community care must be accessible, affordable, and culturally safe.**

Feedback highlighted that Pacific disabled people experience long waits for appointments, limited access to allied health services such as physiotherapy and speech-language therapy, high costs, and fragmented care pathways. Submitters raised concerns about inequities between the accident compensation and the Disability Support Services models where people with accident-related disabilities receive comprehensive support while those with lifelong disabilities face capped budgets and delays.

Submitters recommended greater investment in primary and community care to ensure Pacific disabled people can access timely and culturally safe support close to home. They highlighted the need for mobile clinics and rural outreach services to reach families who face transport, cost, and distance barriers.

Submitters also stressed the importance of continuity of care, noting that being able to see the same clinicians builds trust, improves communication, and leads to better long-term health outcomes. Alongside these improvements, submitters called for better alignment between ACC and DSS supports to remove systemic inequities, reduce confusion for families, and ensure disabled people receive consistent, fair access to rehabilitation, equipment, and ongoing assistance regardless of the funding pathway.

## **Public spaces and recreation must support health, belonging, and quality of life.**

Submitters reported that health strategies often overlook the importance of recreation and social participation for disabled people. They highlighted barriers such as inaccessible public bathrooms, lack of hoists or changing facilities, and limited mobility parking, which restrict independence and community engagement in day-to-day life for disabled people.

They recommended embedding accessibility standards in public infrastructure and incentivising businesses to provide inclusive facilities, including mobility parking and accessible bathrooms. Submitters also called for the government to fund community-based programs that promote physical activity, cultural engagement, and social wellbeing as part of holistic health.

## **Transport must enable equitable access to health services.**

Transport was described by submitters as a critical enabler of health access for disabled people. They shared that many disabled people cannot attend appointments because mobility taxis and public transport are unreliable, unaffordable, or unavailable, especially in rural areas and during peak times in cities.

Submitters recommended mandated transport coordination between health providers and regional councils, subsidised mobility services, and national training standards for transport staff to ensure respectful and informed service delivery for disabled people.

## **The health workforce needs disability competence and cultural safety training.**

Submitters noted that health professionals often lack disability competence, cultural awareness, and NZSL skills, and this can lead to poor communication and inconsistent care for Pacific disabled people. Pacific communities reported a shortage of local providers who understand their cultural context.

They recommended introducing national training standards covering disability responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, and cultural safety, alongside recruitment and retention strategies for Pacific and Māori health professionals.

### **Health communication must be accessible across all formats.**

Submitters reported that medical information is frequently inaccessible due to jargon, complex forms, and limited interpreter availability. Digital-only processes further exclude disabled and Pacific people who lack internet access or digital literacy.

Submitters recommended guaranteeing accessible communication across all health touchpoints, including implementing health communication passports, free NZSL interpreters at health services, translators for Pacific languages, easy read/plain language and Pacific language materials, and non-digital service options.

### **Financial barriers must be reduced to support early diagnosis and ongoing care.**

The high cost of GP visits, medication, and hospital parking disproportionately affects disabled families because they face a compounding combination of higher, more frequent healthcare utilization and lower average household incomes. Submitters also raised concerns about delayed and inconsistent early identification for neurodiversity and developmental conditions.

They called for reducing direct costs of healthcare services through subsidies, restoring free hospital parking for disabled people and carers, and funding early assessment and intervention for neurodiversity and allied health services.

### **Health data systems must uphold Pacific data sovereignty and equity monitoring.**

Submitters stressed that disability health data is fragmented and lacks transparency, making it difficult to monitor outcomes for disabled people. They recommended co-designing data systems with disabled communities to uphold data sovereignty, ensure consent safeguards, and enable robust reporting for accountability.

### **Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) and eligibility processes must be simplified and fair for Pacific families.**

Submitters described the health system as confusing and fragmented, with NASC processes creating delays and stress for disabled people and their families and carers. They reported that eligibility rules for Disability Support

Services require repeated proof of disability and impose capped budgets, leaving families without timely support.

Submitters recommended strengthening support for Pacific disabled people by creating one-stop navigation hubs that provide face to face assistance, alongside increasing funding for additional social workers. Submitters also emphasized the need for culturally appropriate communication resources to ensure services are responsive and inclusive. Submitters would also like to see system improvements included in the NASC criteria to address access barriers, removing unnecessary evidence requirements that delay support and introducing more flexible funding options for equipment and personalised support.

### **Rural health services need investment and Pacific workforce representation.**

Submitters reported severe shortages of health services in rural areas, particularly Northland, where some hospitals rely on virtual consultations due to lack of doctors. They called for funding mobile clinics, and incentivising Pacific health professionals to work in rural communities to increase Pacific representation in the rural regions.

### **Carers must be included and resourced in health planning.**

Submitters noted that carers are often excluded from health planning and unfunded for hospital stays. They recommended mandating funded support person presence during hospital admissions, providing travel concessions, and offering respite options.

### **Assistance dog access must be guaranteed across health services.**

Submitters reported inconsistent treatment of disability assist dog users across health facilities and transport services, noting that legal access rights are not always upheld. They emphasised that denial of access can create significant safety risks, disrupt mobility, and undermine the independence of dog handlers. Submitters also highlighted broader concerns within the assist dog system, including reports that some guide dog organisations are reducing placements or avoiding certain regions, such as parts of South Auckland, which further limits equitable access for Pacific disabled people. To address these issues, submitters recommended introducing national standards, mandatory staff training, and clear enforcement mechanisms to

guarantee consistent and lawful assist dog access across all health and transport settings.

**Mental health services must be timely, trauma-informed, and adequately funded.**

Submitters highlighted that mental health services are under-resourced in primary care, and delays exacerbate anxiety and behavioural challenges for disabled people. They recommended investing in primary mental health supports, trauma-informed training, and early psychological interventions.

## **Housing**

**Housing must meet accessibility and modification needs for Pacific disabled people.**

Submitters reported severe accessibility shortfalls in housing, including long waitlists for modifications, and homes lacking ramps, accessible bathrooms, or safe layouts. One family described their experience of waiting since 2021 for a single-level accessible home while living in unsuitable conditions.

Submitters recommended mandating universal design standards in all new builds, streamlining home modification processes, and increasing occupational therapist resourcing to speed up assessments and prevent in-home accidents.

**Housing supply must address affordability and overcrowding for Pacific families.**

Submitters highlighted that housing costs and overcrowding disproportionately affect disabled and Pacific families. Submitters shared experiences such as some Pacific households needing to have up to twelve people in a two-bedroom home.

Submitters called for expanding the accessible housing stock, funding retrofits, and providing subsidies for home deposits and rent to support disabled Pacific people and their families. They also urged the government to commit to build more affordable, accessible social housing, and to ensure strategic placement to meet community needs.

### **Disabled people must receive clear, coordinated navigation support.**

Submitters shared that they and their families struggled to navigate housing systems and often did not have clear contact points and that this led to stress and delays. Submitters reported feeling “degraded” when told they were not a priority on housing waitlists.

Submitters recommended creating disability housing hubs as one-stop shops for advocacy and coordinated casework to assist and navigate barriers they may face with housing related issues. Submitters recommended these hubs should be staffed with social workers, occupational therapists, and interpreters to provide culturally responsive support and reduce red tape.

### **Housing models must support Pacific cultural and family structures.**

Submitters emphasised the need for housing that supports large, multigenerational families and reflects cultural identity for Pacific disabled people.

They called for designing culturally appropriate housing models that support multigenerational families and prevent overcrowding. Some submitters recommended improving landlord engagement via education and training to reduce discrimination against Pasifika and disabled tenants. Submitters also recommended partnerships with Pacific-led housing and disability providers and councils to co-design solutions that embed Pacific community voice.

### **Housing quality must protect health and safety for disabled and Pacific families.**

Submitters raised concerns about cold, damp, and mouldy homes, poor ventilation, and a lack of disability-specific safety features such as visual alarms, accessible bathrooms, and safe layouts. They stressed that housing quality directly impacts health and wellbeing, particularly for disabled and Pacific families.

To address these issues, submitters recommended strengthening the Healthy Homes standards to include disability requirements, funding targeted remediation for homes that fail to meet these standards and (as discussed earlier), promoting universal design principles in all new builds and retrofits. Universal design was highlighted as essential for creating homes that are

inherently accessible, safe, and adaptable for people of all ages and abilities, reducing the need for costly modifications later.

### **Private rental markets must address discrimination and accessibility barriers.**

Submitters reported that some landlords refuse to rent to disabled Pacific individuals and families, and that application processes are often inaccessible.

They called for stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, education for landlords on disability and cultural needs, and incentives for retrofitting private rentals to be more accessible.

### **Agencies must coordinate to reduce duplication and delays in housing support.**

Some submitters highlighted poor coordination between WINZ, ACC, Kāinga Ora, and health services, which leads to delays and the need for Pacific disabled people to repeatedly provide information to multiple agencies. This can leave them feeling exhausted, unheard, and confused.

Submitters suggested establishing cross-agency housing protocols, assigning named case leads, and embedding accountability measures to ensure timely delivery of housing solutions for Pacific disabled people.

## **Justice**

### **Justice environments must be physically and digitally accessible.**

Submitters considered that courts, police stations, and custody facilities are often physically and digitally inaccessible, with transport barriers limiting access to justice services. They called for embedding accessibility in justice infrastructure through universal design and upgrading digital systems to meet accessibility standards, including plain language, and providing NZSL interpretation and resources.

Submitters also recommended integrating accessible transport planning into justice strategies, such as subsidised mobility services for disabled people and carers to attend justice services, to ensure equitable access.

### **Pacific disabled people must have access to rights information and safeguarding.**

Submitters considered that Pacific disabled people lack accessible information on legal rights and complaint processes, and safeguarding options for them are limited. Submitters called for proactive rights education campaigns in Pacific languages, the provision of plain-language legal resources, and interpreters for Pacific languages and NZSL provided by default at all justice touchpoints.

Submitters also recommended creating accessible reporting pathways and culturally safe refuge spaces for disabled people experiencing abuse, alongside stronger enforcement of anti-exploitation laws to protect vulnerable individuals.

### **Justice services must be adequately resourced and culturally safe.**

Submitters explained that justice services do not have enough staff, funding, or time to meet the needs of the communities they support. They also said that different parts of the justice system do not work well together, which makes it harder for people to get consistent or timely help. At the same time, Pacific communities continue to face racism within the system and often feel that their concerns are not taken seriously. Submitters also highlighted that Pacific peoples are rarely represented in leadership or decision-making roles, which limits their ability to influence how justice services are designed and delivered.

Submitters called for greater Pacific representation across courts, Police, and legal services through targeted recruitment and scholarships. They also recommended funding Pacific led advocacy and legal support services, as well as improving data collection and reporting on disability and ethnicity to support early intervention and equity measures.

### **Support workers and carers must be recognised and enabled within justice processes.**

Submitters emphasised the need to recognise, and resource support workers and carers who assist disabled people in navigating the justice system. They called for more support workers to be available during legal processes and for funding models that acknowledge their critical role in safeguarding rights and ensuring access, including travel concessions and flexible arrangements for carers.

## **Rehabilitation must be holistic and culturally grounded.**

Submitters emphasised that Pacific disabled people need holistic rehabilitation approaches when transitioning back into the community after involvement with the justice system.

Submitters recommended developing rehabilitation programmes that integrate health, housing, and social support, and include church ministers and cultural leaders to provide spiritual and cultural guidance. They also called for wraparound services for reintegration, including mental health and vocational support, to reduce recidivism and promote wellbeing.

## **Ableism and mistrust in the justice system must be addressed through systemic reform.**

Submitters highlighted significant concerns about ableism, misinterpretation of disability related behaviours, and limited cultural understanding across Police, legal professionals, and the courts, noting these issues contribute to unsafe interactions and longstanding mistrust among Pacific disabled people. They recommended mandatory disability responsiveness and cultural safety training for all justice sector staff, alongside establishing specialist disability units within Police and court services.

Submitters also called for stronger relationships between justice agencies and Pacific communities through ongoing engagement initiatives to reduce discrimination and build trust. To ensure accountability, they urged systemic reforms that eliminate bias, align all processes with the UNCRPD, and introduce regular audits and public reporting on accessibility and equity performance.

## **Justice agencies need effective tools to identify disability and support needs.**

Submitters considered that justice agencies need better tools to understand disability-related needs. They suggested enabling secure access to medical records for justice professionals under strict privacy safeguards and introducing Hāpai Cards<sup>3</sup> as a voluntary identification tool for disabled people

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hapaiaccesscard.org.nz/introducing-the-h%C4%81pai-access-card>

to signal support needs. They also recommended developing protocols for disability identification that respect privacy and cultural considerations.

### **Pacific disabled people need culturally safe legal support and advocacy.**

Submitters reported significant gaps in rights awareness and safeguarding for Pacific disabled people, noting limited access to plain language legal information, and accessible complaint pathways. They called for proactive rights education campaigns delivered in Pacific languages, alongside default access to interpreters at all justice touchpoints. Submitters also highlighted the need for culturally safe reporting options and refuge spaces for disabled people experiencing abuse, supported by stronger enforcement of antiexploitation laws. In addition, they emphasised that Pacific families require culturally responsive legal services to navigate complex justice processes. Submitters recommended funding Pacific led advocacy and legal education services, developing community based legal hubs offering multilingual and culturally competent support, and partnering with Pacific providers to deliver outreach and rights awareness initiatives.

## **Impact of submissions on the final strategy and next steps**

The submissions received as part of this consultation process informed the development of the final New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030.

The final strategy document incorporates changes in response to public feedback, including feedback from Pacific disabled people and their families and Pacific organisations. This includes amendments to goals, descriptions of success, cases for change, actions, and adding emphasis and explanatory information.

The submissions received will also help inform implementation and monitoring of the strategy. The Ministry will work with other agencies to develop an implementation plan for the strategy in early 2026.